



Tennessee Wild Turkey Management Program Status Report

TN-NWTF State Board Meeting
July 11, 2026

Roger Shields
Wild Turkey Program Coordinator
Wildlife and Forestry Division

2026 Spring Turkey Season

- 34,990 turkeys reported
 - 13% above 5-yr average (31,038)
 - Record harvest on public land (2,840; +28% over the 5-year avg.)
 - Record harvest in West Unit (1,411; +52% over 5-year avg.)
- 28,266 hunters reported harvesting at least 1 turkey
 - 19% greater than 5-year average (23,703)

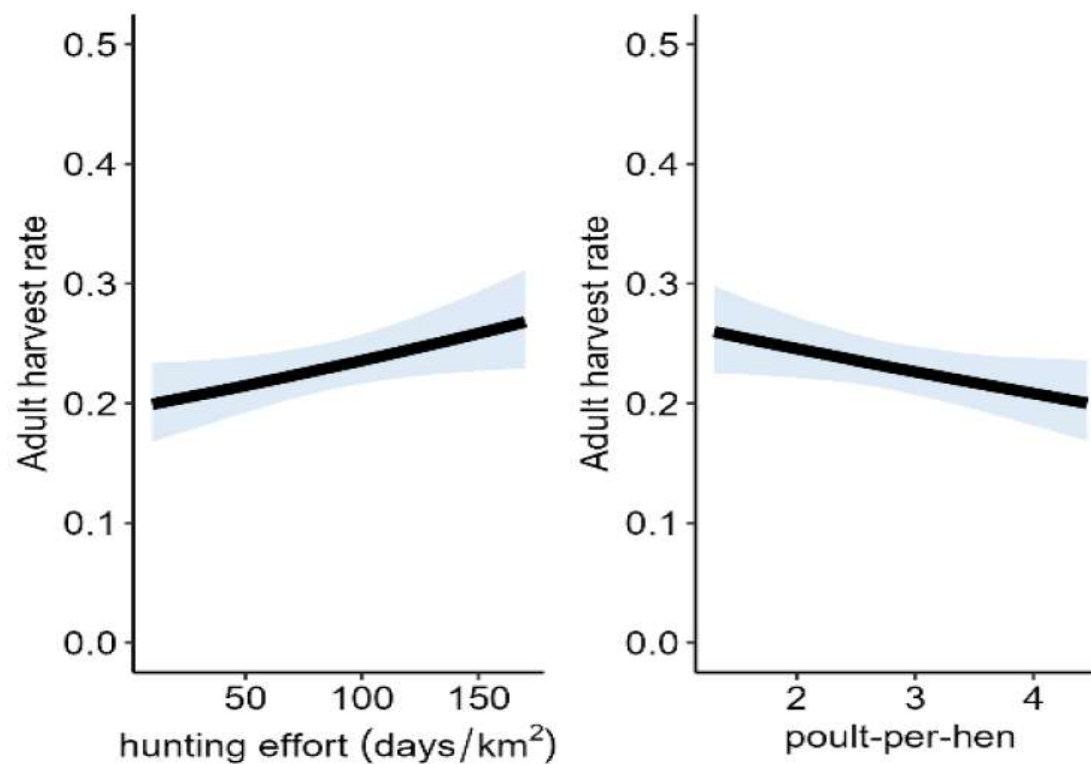


Take Home Message

- 2026 spring turkey harvest higher than recent years
 - 4th highest on record
- Influences on harvest
 - Decent hatch in 2024 (~more birds on the landscape)
 - Great weather across the state
 - higher participation (effort) => higher harvest rate



Hunting Pressure and Gobbler Density Effects on Harvest Rate



Take Home Message

- 2026 spring turkey season higher than recent years
 - 4th highest on record
- Influences on harvest
 - Decent hatch in 2024 (more birds on the landscape)
 - Great weather across the state
 - higher participation (effort) => higher harvest rate
- Additional data being collected
 - Hunter harvest survey obtaining effort data, opinion, more...

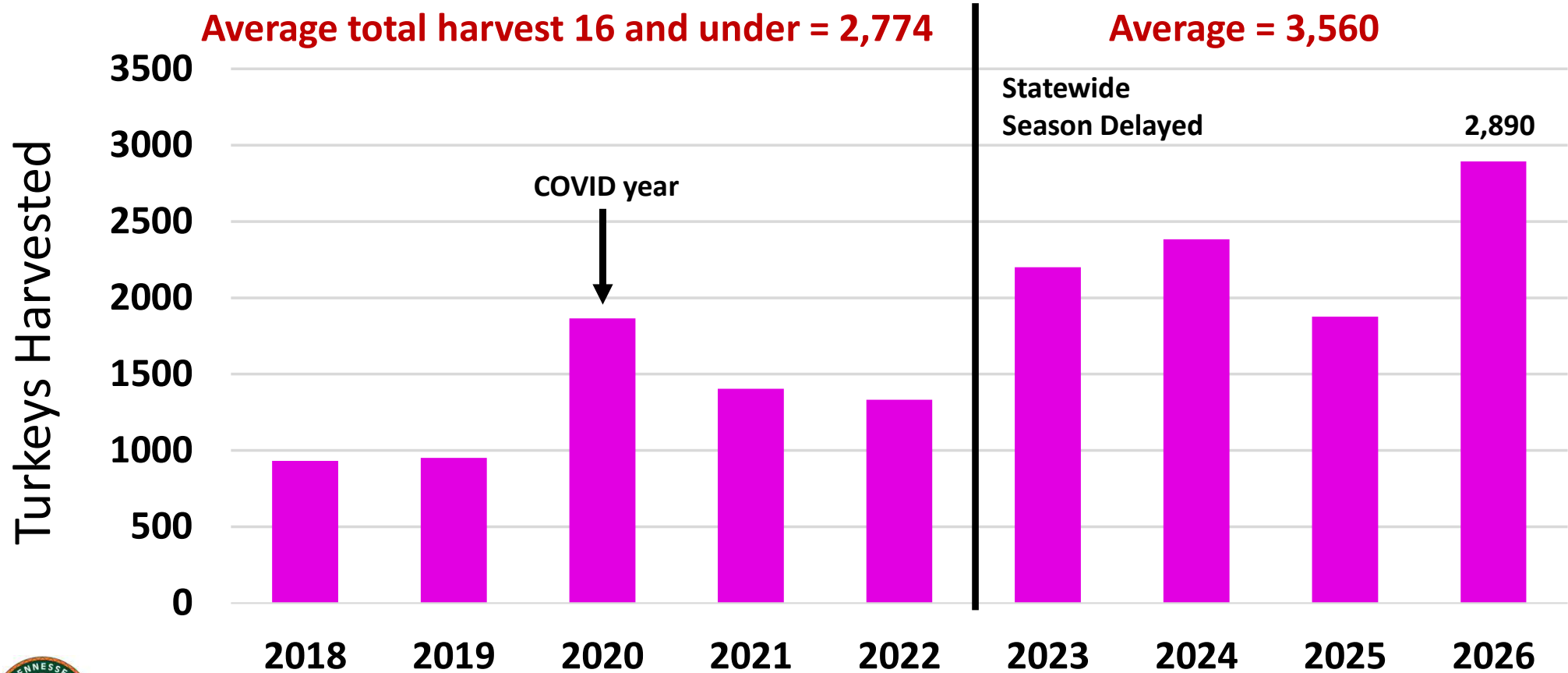


Regulations for 2026-27 Season

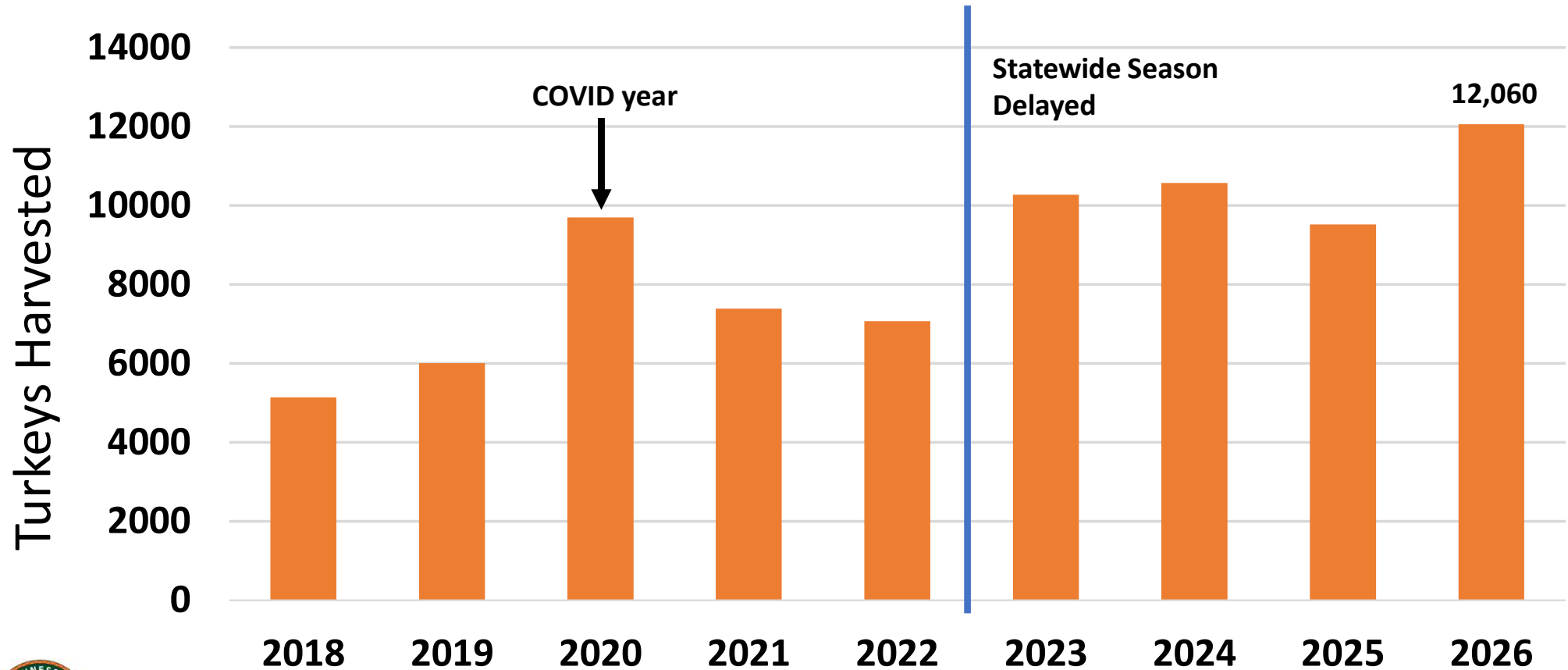
- (**NEW**) Begin Saturday *before* April 10
 - April 3 - May 16, 2027
- 2-bird bag limit statewide
 - Only 1 jake
- No bearded hens (all hen harvest prohibited)
 - Applies both fall and spring
- Fall season bag limit: 1 gobbler statewide
 - 11 counties still closed



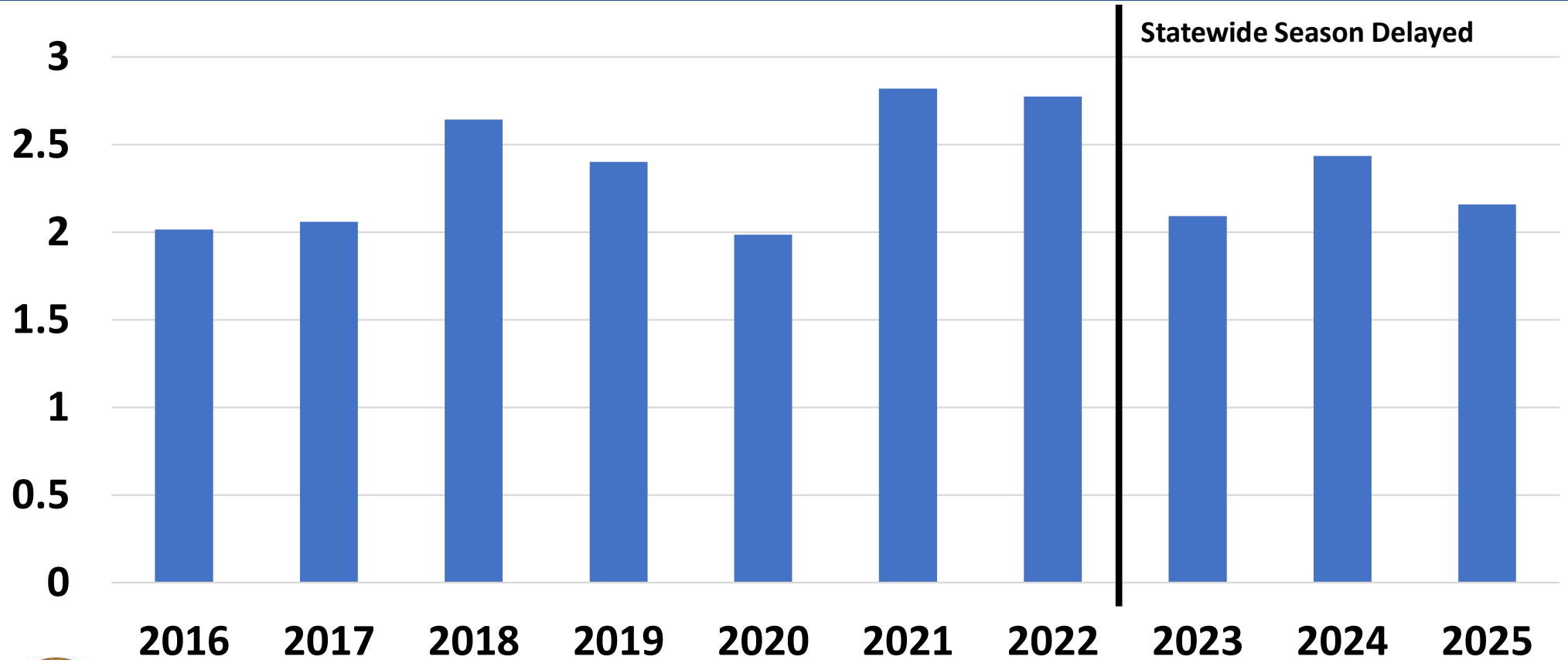
Youth Weekend Turkey Harvest, 2018-2026



Opening Weekend Turkey Harvest, 2018-2026



Poults per Hen (PPH)



Turkey Season Opening Date

- New Opener: Saturday prior to April 10th (3rd – 9th)
- Effort to balance
 - Gobbling intensity
 - Hunter success
 - Favorable weather (youth weekends)
 - Ongoing uncertainty of impacts of season start date





UT Research Results – Predator Density Affects and Gobbler Survival

Gobbler Survival and Harvest Rate Estimates

Telemetry Study (UT)

- Annual survival
 - 0.73 - juveniles
 - 0.38 - adults
- Harvest rate
 - 0.03 for juveniles
 - 0.32 for adults

From: Smith 2026, UT Thesis

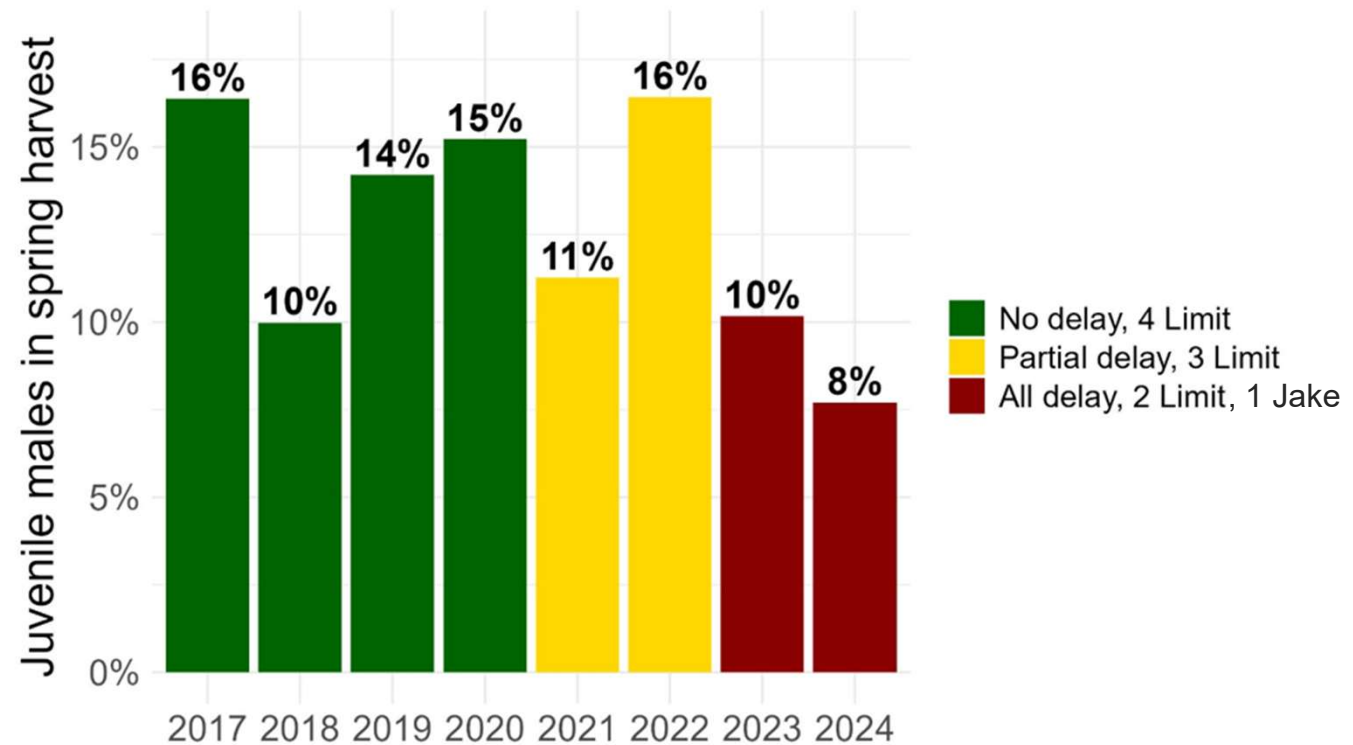
Banding Study (TTU)

- Annual survival
 - 0.74 - juveniles
 - 0.52 - adults
- Harvest rate
 - 0.07 for juveniles
 - 0.29 for adults

From: Riggs 2025, TTU Thesis



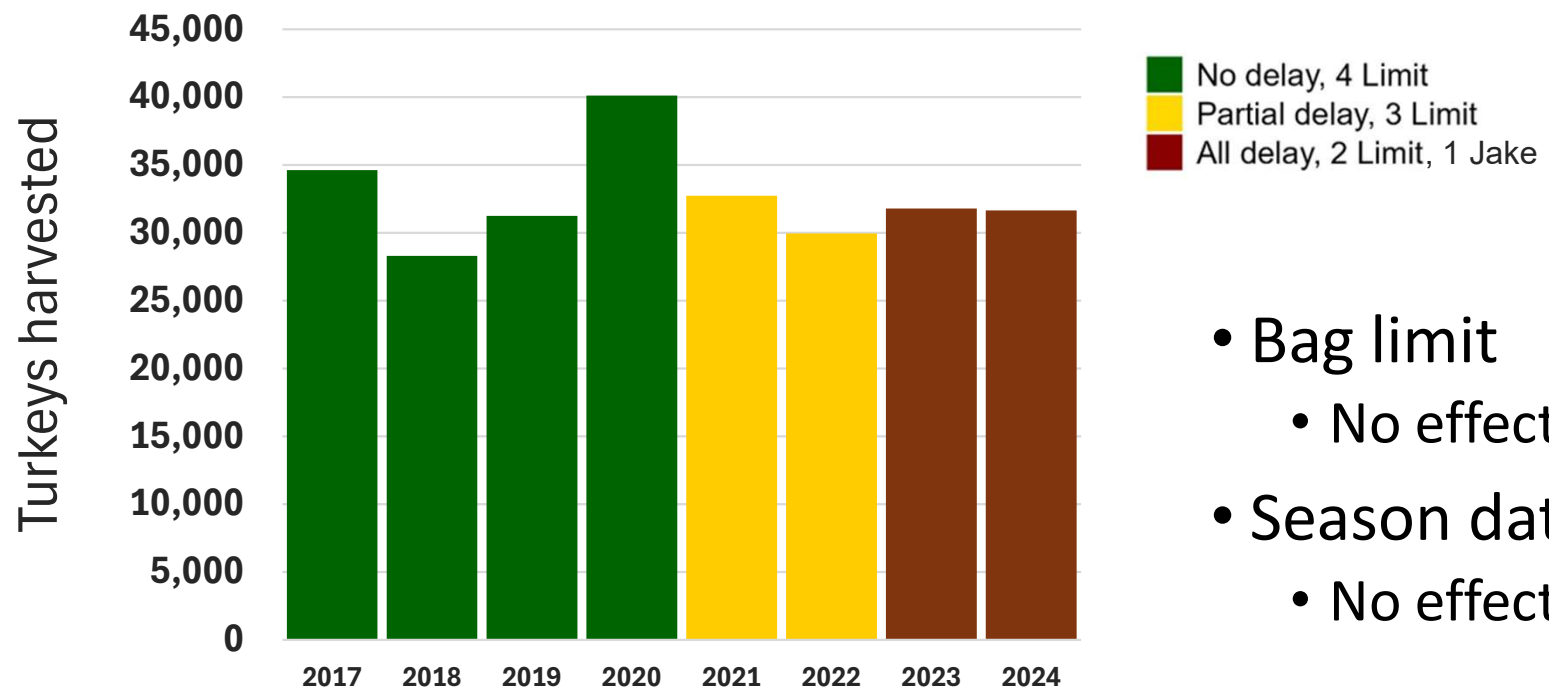
Effect of Regulations - % Jakes



From: Smith 2026, UT Thesis



Effect of Regulations – Gobbler Harvest

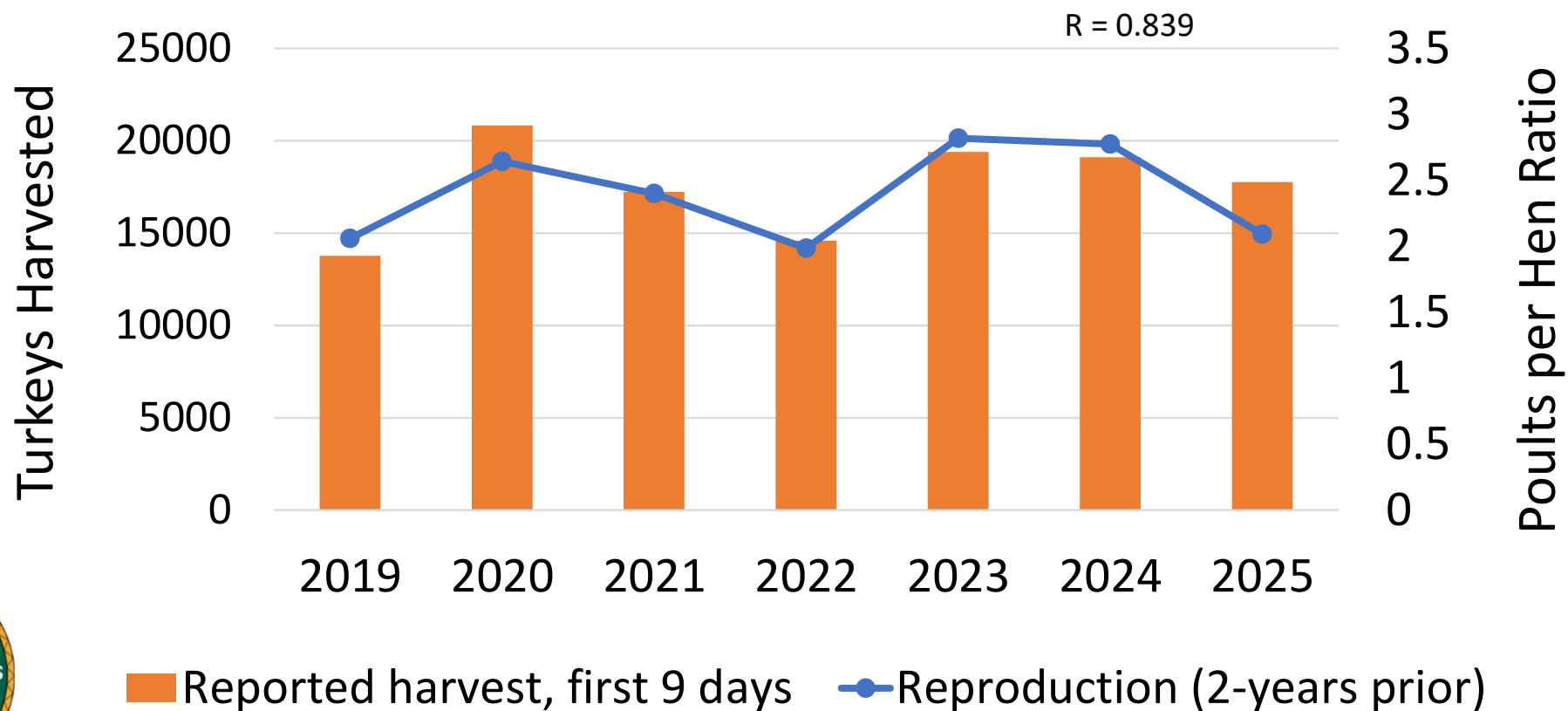


- Bag limit
 - No effect
- Season date
 - No effect

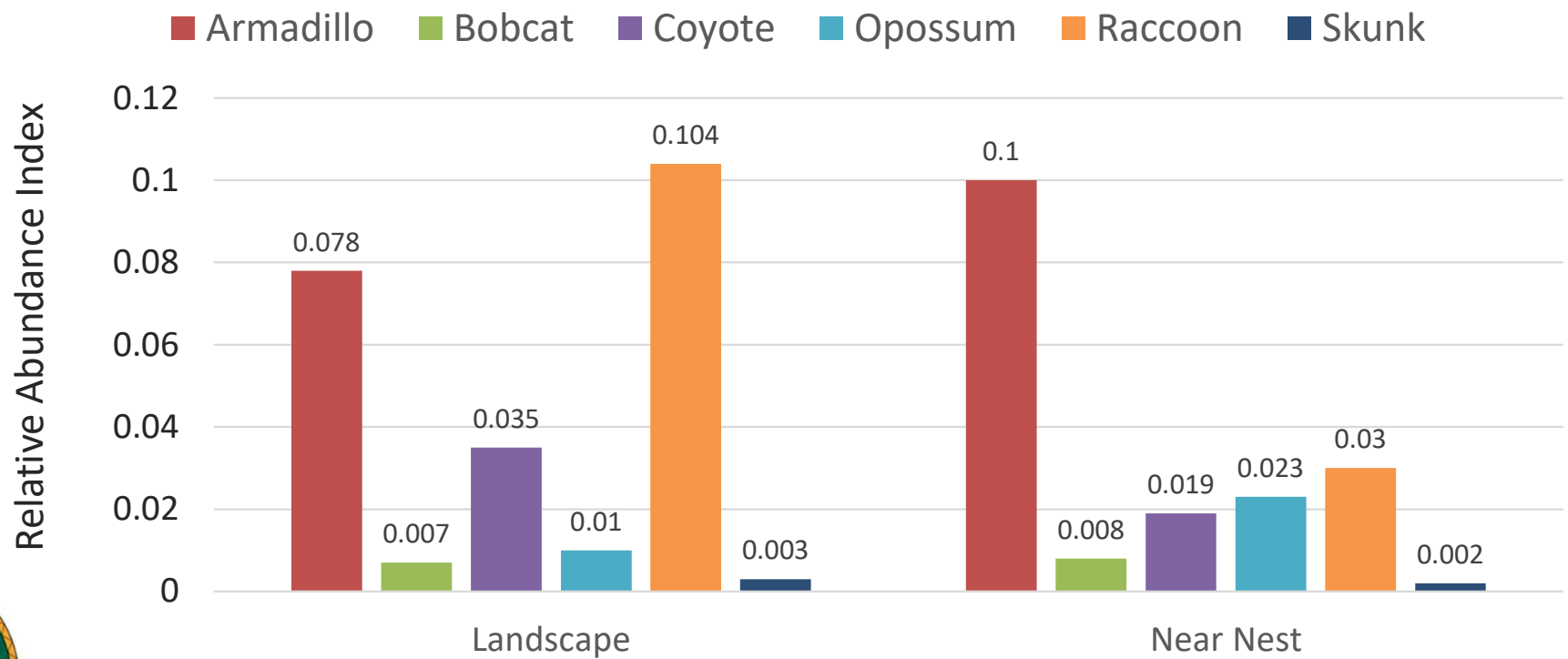
From: Smith 2026, UT Thesis



9-day Harvest vs Reproduction 2 Years Prior



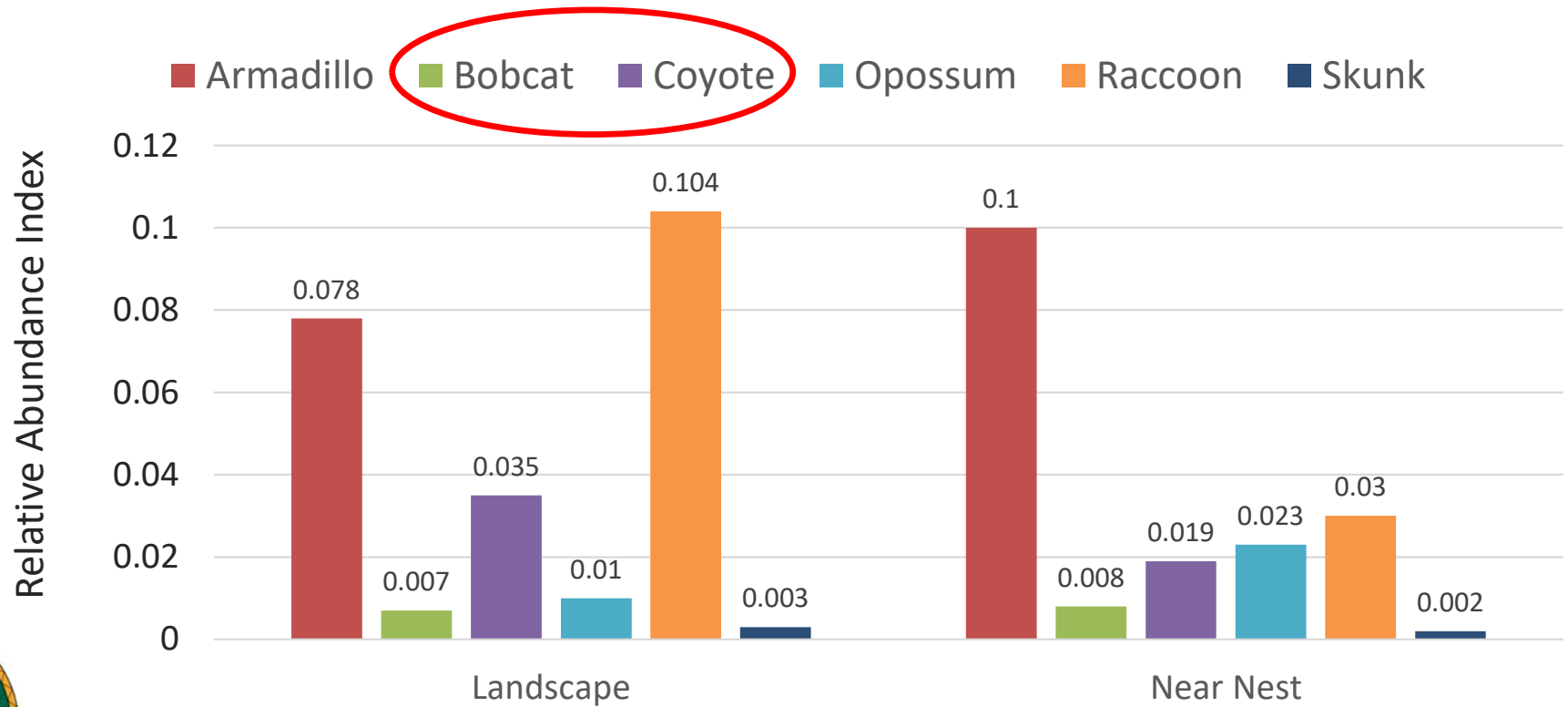
Relative Abundance of Nest Predators



From: Swafford 2026, UT Thesis



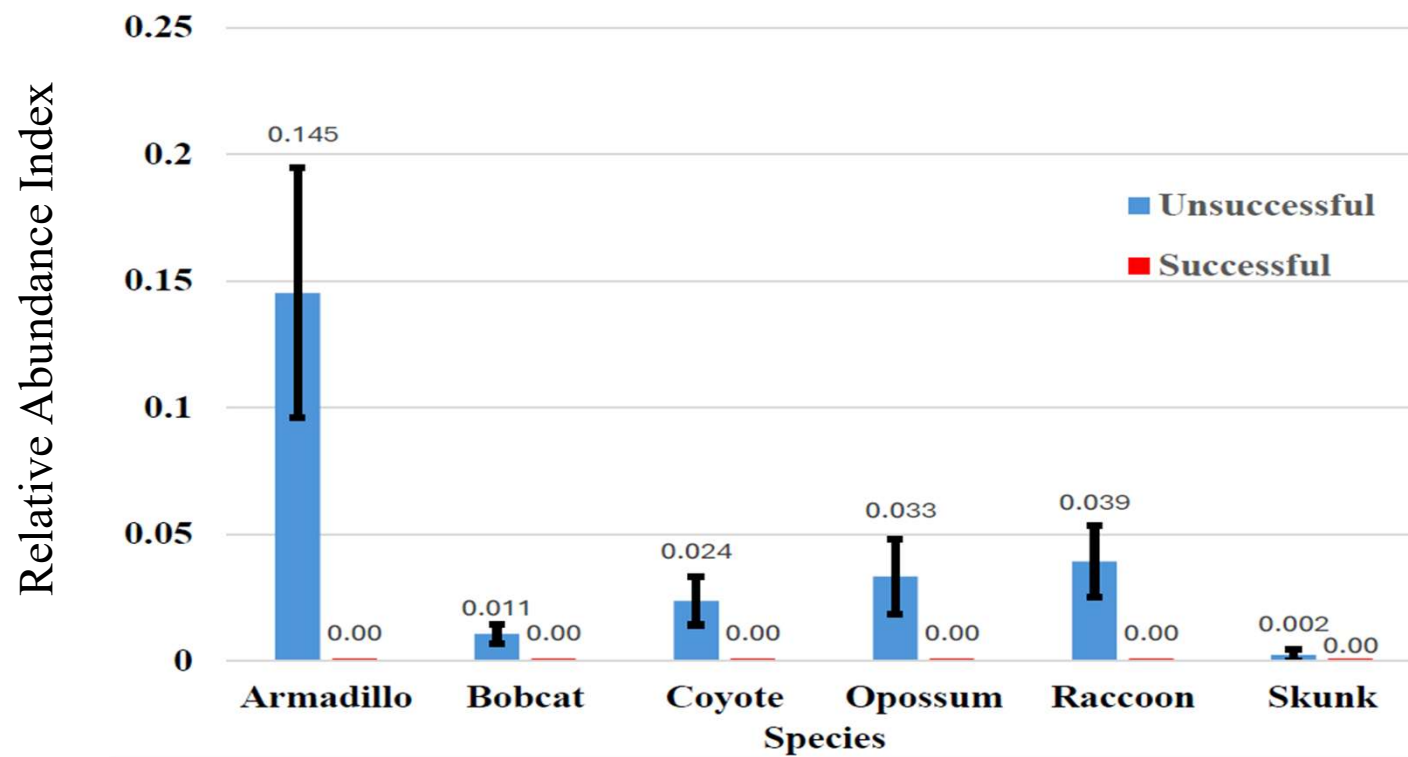
Relative Abundance of Nest Predators



From: Swafford 2026, UT Thesis



Relative Abundance vs Nest Fate

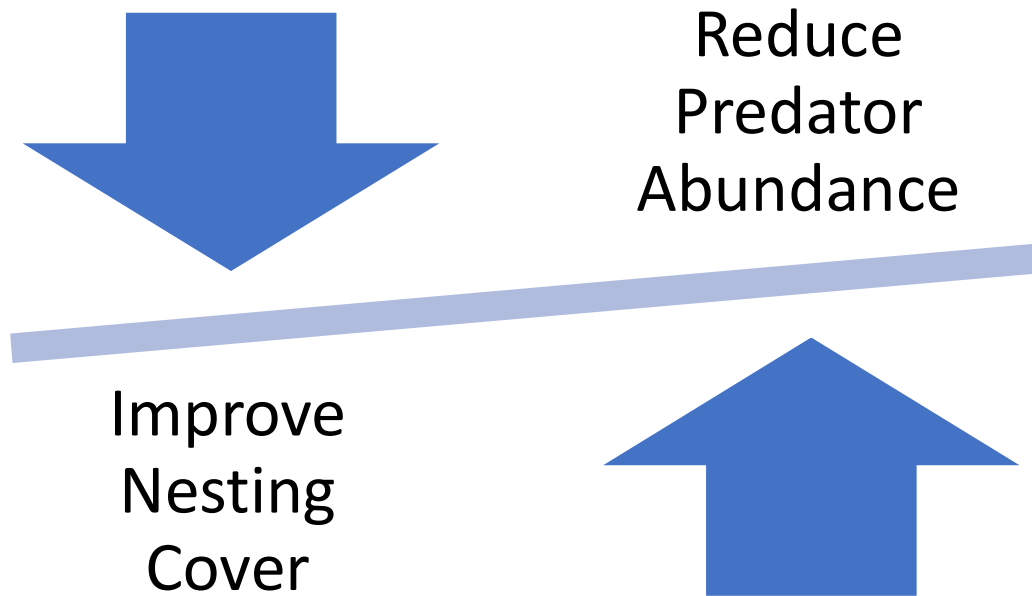


From: Swafford 2026, UT Thesis





Methods of Reducing Risk of Detection





Miscellaneous Items

DNA Project Samples

- Working with Turkey DNA
 - Define wild vs domestic
 - Define geographic distribution of subsp
 - Describe genetic variability and relatedness within TN
 - Depict genetic “clusters” within TN
- Samples from 116 turkeys
 - Several with plumage color aberrations



TDTN106



License Restructure and Increase - 2.0

- Legislature supported the agency with 1-year funding bump, but fell short of providing recurring budget funds
- Due to lack of long-term funding support by Legislature, TWRA likely to run the licensing restructure rules again
- Proposed pricing and structure will follow previous plan



New Way to Report Wildlife Violations

- TWRA partnered with Hunt Regs
 - Anonymous
 - Pin locations on a map
 - Attach photos
 - Reports go directly to TWRA Officers
- Simplified hunting regulations
 - Shows only regs that apply to your location and target species



Hunt Regs App
Stay Legal. Strike Smart.



West Tennessee Turkey Hunting Case

- 5 West TN residents and 1 Mississippi resident
- 36 total violations (24 by one individual)
- \$16,000 in restitution + fines and court costs (~\$6,000)
- Forfeited 79 turkey beards, 17 turkey fans, one white turkey, four shotguns, and one compound bow





Wild Turkey Observation Survey

- Summer “Brood” Survey
 - But not just broods
- Submit observations online or via cell phone app
- Visit:

www.tn.gov/twra/turkeyobs



Thank you!!





Questions